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Viewing cable 05PARIS676, UMP LEADERS BRICE HORTEFEUX AND BERNARD ACCOYER --

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05PARIS676	2005-02-03 05:44	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

Appears in these articles:

http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/documents-wikileaks/article/2011/02/09/wikileaks-les-visiteurs-de-l-ambassade_1477418_1446239.htm

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000676

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR EUR/WE, DRL/IL AND INR/EUC
DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB
DEPT OF COMMERCE FOR ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2010
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [SOCI](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: UMP LEADERS BRICE HORTEFEUX AND BERNARD ACCOYER --
DIFFERENT VIEWS OF CHIRAC'S FUTURE AND SARKOZY'S DESTINY

REF: A. (A) PARIS 521

[1B.](#) (B) PARIS 278

Classified By: Classified by Minister Counselor for Political Affairs J
osiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d

SUMMARY

11. (C) The views of two leading members of the ruling, center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party highlight how the unresolved rivalry between Nicolas Sarkozy and President Chirac for leadership of the center-right is dividing the UMP's elite of elected officials. Brice Hortefeux is a key member of the party's executive committee and a close advisor to Sarkozy. Bernard Accoyer is the President of the UMP party group in the National Assembly. Predictably, those like Hortefeux who are committed to supporting Sarkozy minimize Chirac's chances of successfully pursuing re-election. Accoyer, like the majority of UMP elected officials who have supported Chirac in the past, are tugged by loyalty to the President and party founder, even if they may not be personally enthusiastic about a possible Chirac bid for re-election. Following the referendum on the proposed constitution next June, the presidential election of 2007 is the next national election in France. This accident of the electoral calendar, along with the unresolved contest between Chirac and Sarkozy, are two factors that have triggered fairly intense positioning for public favor by the contenders for the presidency and their supporters, even though the election is still well over two years away. END
SUMMARY.

UMP "LOYALISTS" SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT

12. (C) In a meeting with PolOff on January 19, Accoyer said he believed President Chirac would pursue a third term in 2007. "It's in his character." According to Accoyer -- and this view is echoed by many long-time observers of President Chirac -- politics is an all-consuming commitment for Chirac, and he is therefore unlikely to end his life in politics voluntarily (ref (A)). Accoyer also said that Chirac's "extraordinary experience" was prompting many members of the UMP to encourage the President to "continue serving France," notably Speaker of the National Assembly Jean-Louis Debre, a leader of the openly pro-Chirac faction. Accoyer said he was not a member of the "Chiraquien" faction, but insisted that he would "of course support the president" if Chirac should be a candidate. Accoyer quickly added that he considered himself a "good friend of Nicolas Sarkozy." Like most of the 362 UMP members of the National Assembly and 152 UMP Senators, Accoyer is reluctant to openly take sides in the rivalry between Chirac and Sarkozy for leadership of the center-right. In a meeting on January 27, Jean-Louis Valentin, Debre's Chief of Staff, confirmed that the large majority of UMP legislators "don't want to have to choose" and that, though there are clearly identifiable "core groups" -- "Sarkozist" and "Chiraquien" -- most UMP elected officials are determined to straddle the fence for as long as possible.

"SARKOZISTS" MINIMIZE CHIRAC'S CHANCES

13. (C) Not unexpectedly, the view of UMP leaders who have committed to supporting Sarkozy in his bid for the presidency in 2007 is that President Chirac's chances of successfully pursuing re-election are not good. Brice Hortefeux, UMP member of the European Parliament and a member of Sarkozy's inner circle of political strategists, told PolMinCouns at a meeting January 26 that President Chirac's age, public sentiment in favor of bringing on the new generation, and Sarkozy's strong popularity effectively dash any hopes Chirac might have of continuing in power. According to Hortefeux, Chirac "cannot risk going down in defeat" as the last act of his twelve years as President of France. Hortefeux added that Chirac's decision on a third term candidacy would have to be decided relatively quickly. An early indication would come out in the beginning of 2006 when Chirac presents his "wishes" for the year -- since the presidential campaign of 2007 begins in earnest in the fall of 2006. Hortefeux said that the public does not want a confrontation between Chirac and Sarkozy, and that the public hopes for an "honorable retirement" for Chirac. The personal dimension of the rivalry between Chirac and Sarkozy, however, is of such intensity that Hortefeux acknowledged that it was difficult to imagine Chirac gracefully retiring from the scene and ceding center stage without a fight. However, Hortefeux also claimed that a poll published the same day in Paris Match, which predicts a clear victory for Sarkozy in a presidential run-off against Chirac, was a "psychological turning point" that will impose acceptance of Sarkozy's near invincibility. COMMENT: We have detected no such dramatic effect since the publication of the poll, but if such clear-cut margins continue to show up in numerous polls, Hortefeux's prediction may eventually pan out. END COMMENT.

WORRIES THE NO'S MIGHT TAKE IT

14. (C) Both Hortefeux and Accoyer reflected the genuine worry among political actors in France that a combination of frustrations and misperceptions among voters could prompt defeat of the proposed EU Constitution in a referendum expected to be held in early June. Hortefeux recalled prior referendums, including the referendum of 1969 in which dissatisfaction and desire for change unexpectedly sent General de Gaulle into retirement, as cautionary precedents for the unpredictability of voter behavior. Accoyer opined that the French experience in North Africa and with North Africans would affect voters' decision on the referendum. Accoyer said that the war in Algeria is what "the French remember about Arabs," and further explained that "the French public confuses the Turks with the Arabs." He said he feared resentment against immigrants of North African origin would prompt many Frenchmen and women to vote against the proposed EU Constitution. COMMENT: The huge investment in voter education (ref (B)) that is part of the government's referendum effort also reveals the extent of establishment apprehension that voters' decision on the proposed constitution will be skewed by misinformation or feelings about unrelated matters. END COMMENT.

ALLEGING CONTINUING STEREOTYPES

15. (C) Turning away from internal politics, Accoyer volunteered that he continued to receive complaints from French "constituents and friends" who live in the U.S. that instances of gratuitous rudeness motivated by anti-French prejudice continue, as does dismissive public commentary and jokes. Accoyer made a point of insisting that the problem

was not all that serious -- but still unpleasant because unnecessary and unjustified. He accused his own fellow-citizens of not appropriately sympathizing with Americans. Without making any concrete suggestion as to exactly how they might do so, Accoyer said he hoped that Presidents Chirac and Bush might "do something" to improve Americans' perception of the French and vice versa, perhaps in the context of their upcoming meeting. Accoyer also expressed the hope that relations between the U.S. and France would improve. He agreed that differences over the war in Iraq were "behind us," but acknowledged that the "psychological" difference between America's "war on terror" and France's "fight against terrorism" keeps it difficult for now to put the relationship between the two countries on the same wavelength. Accoyer insisted that France's commitment to fighting terrorism in all its forms was unconditional, but that, for the French, terrorism remains in the realm of law enforcement and threats against security in civil society rather than that of war and threats against national security.

COMMENT

16. (C) Hortefeux hitched his wagon to Sarkozy's star over twenty years ago and, like other UMP members of Sarkozy's inner circle, he is insistently "on message" when it comes to assessing the viability of other candidacies, especially that of President Chirac. Accoyer, a medical doctor from the conservative, Haute Savoie region in the foothills of the Alps, is typical of the bulk of UMP elected officials -- clearly tugged by the loyalty he feels he owes the president and party founder Jacques Chirac, even if not personally enthusiastic about the prospect of supporting Chirac for a third term. Appearing on French TV's leading political forum on January 27, Interior Minister and Chirac loyalist Dominique de Villepin raised his profile as a contender for high office -- possibly as Chirac's next prime minister and thereafter possibly as Chirac's successor -- in an effort to counter the growing perception that a Sarkozy succession is inevitable. Sarkozy spent the week-end of January 29 - 30 energetically campaigning in northern France, assiduously working to maintain his credibility as the center-right's rightful leader, likely winner, and force for change. The intensity of campaign activity, even though the Presidential election of 2007 is over two years away, is due in part both to the unresolved rivalry between Chirac and Sarkozy and to the electoral calendar. After the referendum on the proposed EU Constitution next Spring, the Presidential election of 2007 is the next national election in France. (National legislative elections are expected in June 2007, just after the presidential election.) END COMMENT.

Leach